

VZCZCXRO3665
RR RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHBUL #0382/01 0320726
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 010726Z FEB 10 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5231

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000382

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ELAB](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [USAID](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: NEW AFGHAN MINISTER OF LABOR CITES CHILD LABOR AS
KEY ISSUE

KABUL 00000382 001.9 OF 002

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On January 26, Ambassador Eikenberry and a team from the Embassy paid a courtesy call on the newly appointed Minister of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and the Disabled (MOLSA), Ms. Amena Afzali. Of the three female Cabinet members President Karzai put forward in the second round, Ms. Afzali is considered by some observers to be the least bold choice on issues such as women's empowerment. A political place-holder, she nevertheless may make her mark in this ministry, and welcomed the USG's interest in addressing crucial social and economic issues. She and the Ambassador agreed on several key issues: the urgency of anti-child labor efforts and the need for more vocational training. They also agreed to explore the possibility of technical assistance to the ministry. End Summary.

"We know you by reputation"

12. (SBU) On January 26, Ambassador Eikenberry, accompanied by Mission officers Mike Spangler, Economic Counselor; Valerie Begley, POL; Grace Lang, USAID, and Heidi Meyer, IPA, paid a courtesy call on Minister Amena Afzali, the newly appointed Minister of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and the Disabled (MOLSA). The Ambassador congratulated Afzali on being the first woman appointed in the new Karzai administration to a ministry other than Women's Affairs, and commended her ability to navigate a "difficult" Parliament. He noted that this visit was his first to the MOLSA, welcomed closer cooperation as partners in Afghan-led efforts in social development efforts, and stressed the importance of economic livelihood for personal dignity and social stability.

13. (SBU) Background: Minister Amena Afzali was the only woman approved in the second round of Afghanistan parliamentary votes for the new cabinet. Heralded by some as a lifelong advocate of human rights, she is nevertheless conservative in her views on social issues, while also filling a "Tajik slot" and appeasing those allied with Fahim Khan. She hails from a prominent Herati family, and her husband was a well-known jihadi killed by the Soviets in 11993. End note.

14. (SBU) In 2004-06, Afzali served as Deputy Minister of Youth Affairs, a small and fairly unimportant ministry. MOLSA is a greater challenge, as a complex ministry with three departments, more than 7,000 employees, and structural divisions which inhibit effective functioning. Some observers are skeptical about her ability to effectively manage the behemoth bureaucracy. They point out the similarities to many female activists in the developing world whose prominence was initially the result of her influential husband and family. Others feel she will bring welcome strength and commitment. For more than a decade, she has worked on peace initiatives; she represented the Northern Alliance at the Bonn peace talks in 2001. She worked on behalf of Afghans in the Diaspora,

conducting courses for refugee girls in Iran and assisting refugee families to settle and integrate. Finally, she emphasizes that she is a war widow who can sympathize with martyrs' families.

"No More Time or Money to Waste"

15. (U) The Ambassador emphasized three key areas of U.S. concern: (a) increased vocational training; (b) implementing the new labor law; and (c) anti-child labor reform. Regarding the omnibus labor law passed in July 2009, the Ambassador discussed placing an advisor in the Ministry -- supplying the right kind of technical assistance to help the Ministry meet goals rather than someone who "drinks tea for years on end." The Minister agreed: "There is no more time or money to waste." She recognized that security is interrelated with economic development and social issues, and emphasized the importance of improving governance and fighting corruption.

16. (U) Addressing child labor as a vital concern, Minister Afzali noted that child labor can only be effectively eliminated when families have alternative, sufficient livelihoods. Addressing vocational training, an AID officer noted that USAID is considering a new vocational education program. In addition, pending Congressional approval, the U.S. Department of Labor plans to extend funding on a successful MOLSA capacity-building initiative.

17. (SBU) Comment: The Minister hit all the right notes: she is anti-waste, anti-corruption, and pro-partnership. She is in favor of vocational training, child labor reform, education, and anti-poverty programs. She has not yet demonstrated depth of knowledge on these topics, but she

KABUL 00000382 002.2 OF 002

appears capable of developing the expertise and insight needed to drive key reforms. Whether she can manage such a large bureaucracy will largely determine her success. Some mentoring will be necessary, as a multi-pronged, cross-ministerial approach is vital to make progress, and MOLSA lacks a good track record on coordinating with other ministries. End Comment.

Ricciardone